



IMAGES *of Success*



2008-2009 Annual Report

North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services



VR

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The Year by the Numbers

- VR assisted 6,290 North Carolinians in achieving successful employment outcomes.
- Independent living objectives were achieved by 2,189 Independent Living program participants.
- Assistive Technology provided 6,717 individuals with equipment loans.
- Disability Determination closed 198,687 cases involving Social Security Disability, Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid Disability benefits.

VR in 2009: Looking Back, Moving Forward

With the historic hit to our economy, the year was a tough one for NCDVRS. State budget cutbacks significantly affected spending. An increase – in part due to economic conditions – in the number of applications for services resulted in a shortage of funding for our independent living program.

But the division stayed on course. Successful closures, the principal parameter for our employment and independent living programs, declined only slightly.

Looking ahead, with the help of federal recovery funds, VR will enhance services in several areas:



Linda Harrington
Director

**N.C. Division of Vocational
Rehabilitation Services**

- increase employers' incentives for providing our consumers on-the-job training;
- broaden consumers' eligibility for agency-sponsored work adjustment services;
- create consumer internships for intensive in-place work experience;
- improve our ability to foster our consumers' entrepreneurship;
- and expand training opportunities for partners, providers and staff.

As we look to better economic times, it's important to note our abiding commitment to those we serve and to those who have traditionally been underserved: Last year, 47 percent of those we served were minority members, and females continue to be proportionally represented among our consumers.

Central to our mission is the number of successful employment outcomes – or job placements – that our consumers achieve after receiving services. As with general employment, these outcomes tend to rise and fall with economic conditions.

But last year, the news for VR consumers was somewhat better than for the general population: From 2008 to 2009, the state's employment rate fell from an average 94.35 to 90.1 percent – a drop of more than four percent. In the same period, VR's successful outcomes fell from 6,442 to 6,290 – a decline of just over two percent, about half the overall rate.

In a time of budget crisis, cutbacks in hiring, increasing workloads, employee furloughs and no salary increases, that result cannot be attributed to chance. It's the direct result of the dedication and sacrifice of VR staff all across the state – with the active support of our consumers and their families, our partner agencies and policymakers, and legislators and administrators at every level of government.

Together, we all will continue to move forward.



Evaluation and Counseling



**Libby Braswell
Clayton**

VR provides services to people with disabilities to assist them in getting or keeping a job. Rehabilitation begins with an assessment of the consumer's strengths, skills and experience. Jointly developed by the consumer and counselor, each individual's plan for employment is carefully monitored and, if needed, adjustments are made. Plans may include: diagnostic services; physical and mental restoration; assistive technology; transportation; modifications to vehicle, home, job and worksite; and others.

Among consumers who completed their rehabilitation plans in FFY 2009, VR provided:

- Assessment services to 10,628 individuals
- Diagnosis and treatment of impairments to 5,713
- Counseling and guidance to 4,100

Categories of services offered beyond the assessment stage include: employment services, rehabilitation technology, training, and personal assistance services.

Benefits Counseling

In North Carolina, the federal Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach initiative operates under the name Making Employment a New Success (MEANS). Under the program, community work incentives coordinators offer group or one-to-one counseling to recipients of Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability benefits to help them understand how going to work often has a less-than-feared effect on their benefits payments. For recipients of traditional VR services, the counseling has helped remove disincentives to seek employment.

- VR's MEANS program has served more than 9,147 Social Security beneficiaries since the program's inception in 2000.
- The program is joined by similar initiatives under Easter Seals UCP of North Carolina, Life Plan Trust and Tri-County Industries of Rocky Mount to offer benefits planning assistance throughout North Carolina.



Deaf/Hard of Hearing

VR provides services to individuals who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or late-deafened to assist them in preparing for, obtaining, or maintaining employment. Counselors work with consumers to help them make informed choices about their job goals and what, among a range of specialized services and equipment, is needed to help meet those goals. Located in 12 of VR's local offices, specially trained counselors assist citizens with hearing loss across North Carolina.

In FFY 2009 VR:

- Provided services to 2,371 consumers with hearing loss.
- Assisted 333 consumers with hearing loss achieve successful employment outcomes.
- Continued to equip local offices with advanced technology to improve consumers' access to services and their employment outcomes.

School-to-Life Services

VR has partnered with local schools across the state to assist students in making a successful transition from their school life to jobs and careers. Services are designed to assist individuals with disabilities – physical, mental or learning related – who require assistance to prepare for, locate, or maintain employment compatible with their interests, skills and potential. For eligible students, VR offers vocational guidance and assistance with training, job placement, and other services. Referrals may be made by a parent, teacher, social worker, school counselor or nurse, or an individual may refer himself or herself.

- In FFY 2009, VR served 16,709 youth, 22 and under, with disabilities.
- VR counselors provided services to 10,583 high school students in 350 high schools in the state.



Ryan Justice
Burlington

Employment Services

Getting or keeping a job is the main goal of the partnership between the consumer and VR. The process begins with evaluation of the consumer's interests, abilities and aptitudes for different kinds of jobs. The employment plan may include college or vocational training, on-the-job training, job

coaching, or supported employment. VR staff often provide information on résumé preparation, interviewing, developing job leads, and assistance in locating a job. After employment, the VR counselor and consumer stay in contact to help make sure the job is a good match.

- In FFY 2009, VR assisted 6,290 North Carolinians in achieving a successful employment outcome.
- Consumers' weekly earnings before receiving services averaged \$46. After employment, the average – reflecting a range of earning levels and full- and part-time jobs – increased to \$274.
- Individuals employed after receiving VR services earned a combined total of \$1.7 million per week.

Services to Employers

Crucial to VR's mission are North Carolina's businesses who each year hire thousands of individuals served by VR. Because each of our referrals is screened, employers can feel more confident that they are a good prospect for their company, and they benefit from services like customized follow-up and on-the-job training that can help make sure the new employee remains a good match for the job. For more than 80 years, VR has been the state's premier resource on issues related to disabilities in the workplace.

- Screening, job-matching and training can reduce employers' recruitment time and costs.
- Employers can benefit from on-site consultations by professionals like our rehabilitation engineers who help ensure that the physical workplace is a good fit for the new employee.
- Employers can benefit from these services at no cost. They may also enjoy tax incentives for hiring a VR referral.



Bill Alvino
Burlington

Community Rehabilitation

VR is able to extend its services for people with disabilities through programmatic partnerships with community rehabilitation programs across the state. These programs are equipped to offer a range of

job-placement and support services to VR consumers with specialized needs. Community rehabilitation services include: vocational evaluation; job development; job coaching; individual or group supported employment; and work adjustment activities designed to help individuals improve work skills, work behaviors, and emotional/physical tolerances for a range of jobs.

- VR directly administers two community rehabilitation programs – in Goldsboro and Morganton – serving individuals in eastern and western North Carolina.
- In FFY 2009, 8,630 consumers received services from a community rehabilitation program.
- Of that number, 1,796 achieved their employment objectives and many others continued to progress toward theirs.

Supported Employment

VR consumers find themselves at many different stages in the type of jobs they prefer, the skills they offer, and their readiness for work. Many consumers benefit from more intensive support services to become acclimated to new employment or in remaining on the job. After placement, supported employment can mean job training at the worksite for as long as needed or a job coach to assist the employee on a longer-term basis – perhaps with daily, weekly or intermittent visits.

- In FFY 2009, 4,516 consumers received supported employment services.
- Of that number, 1,043 achieved their employment objectives and many others continued to progress toward theirs.
- Supported employment services may be supplemented by or directly provided by a local, VR-approved community rehabilitation program.

Rehabilitation Engineering

With technology and a commitment to creative problem-solving, VR's rehabilitation engineers help consumers overcome physical barriers in a number of areas, including education, transportation, employment, independent living and recreation. Services can cover: adaptive computer access; augmentative communication; seating/mobility; and home, vehicle, and worksite modifications. Engineers often consult with employers to assist in removing architectural



barriers so that new employees with disabilities or current employees who have acquired disabilities may be accommodated.

- In FFY 2009, 1,161 barrier removal projects at consumers' residences were successfully completed.
- During the same period, vehicle modification projects were completed for 149 consumers.
- Rehabilitation engineering projects completed for consumers exceeded \$5 million in cost.



**Ronnie Isler
Kinston**

Independent Living

Independence can often mean living in the home and community of choice. To help its consumers achieve that end, the Independent Living program offers evaluation and counseling, vehicle modifications, peer counseling and advocacy, rehabilitation engineering, prosthetics and orthotics, personal assistance services, recreational therapy, and assistance with leisure activities. Independent living counselors and program participants jointly plan how to achieve a viable, cost-effective alternative to institutional living.

- In FFY 2009, 5,314 individuals received services under an Individualized Plan for Independent Living (IPIL).
- IPILs were completed by 2,189 program participants.
- Personal assistance services were provided to 364 individuals at an average cost of \$11,652 per year.

Assistive Technology

For people of all ages and disabilities, assistive technology devices can make everyday living more independent. Offering access in all 100 counties, VR's Assistive Technology (AT) staff demonstrate how assistive technology can improve computer use, daily living activities, mobility, communication, education, leisure, alarm systems, and environmental controls. AT offers short-term loans for trying out devices, information/referral services, rights advocacy for individuals

and families, and financial resource information. During 2009, the Assistive Technology Program:

- Provided 6,717 individuals with equipment loans.
- Provided training on assistive technology to 9,256 individuals
- Sponsored the eighteenth annual Assistive Technology Expo with 1,200 attendees.

Disability Determination

Under an agreement with the Social Security Administration, Disability Determination Services (DDS) receives applications from SSA offices across the state and adjudicates Social Security Disability (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments. DDS performs the same function with Medicaid claims received from the state's county departments of social services.

- In FFY 2009, DDS closed 198,687 cases involving SSDI, SSI and Medicaid disability benefits.
- The average time for processing SSDI cases – from receipt to closure – was 118 days.

Client Assistance Program

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is a federally funded program that serves anyone seeking information, applying for services or receiving services from agencies receiving federal monies under the Rehabilitation Act. These include the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Division of Services for the Blind, the independent living rehabilitation programs within those divisions, and the the state's centers for independent living. Services include bridging gaps that may occur in accessing rehabilitation services, assisting with the appeals process and providing information and referral.

- In FFY 2009, CAP increased its information and referrals to individuals by 25.9 percent, and
- Provided outreach to 10,068 individuals in traditionally unserved or underserved populations.

North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Data Summary: Federal Fiscal Year 2008 – 2009

Overview: Vocational Rehabilitation Employment Services	
Consumers Served in FFY 2009	54,551
Consumers still developing an Individualized Plan of Employment at the last day of the FFY	5,189
Consumers Served through Individualized Plans of Employment	41,955
Consumers still receiving services at the last day of the FFY	31,308
Successful employment outcomes	6,290

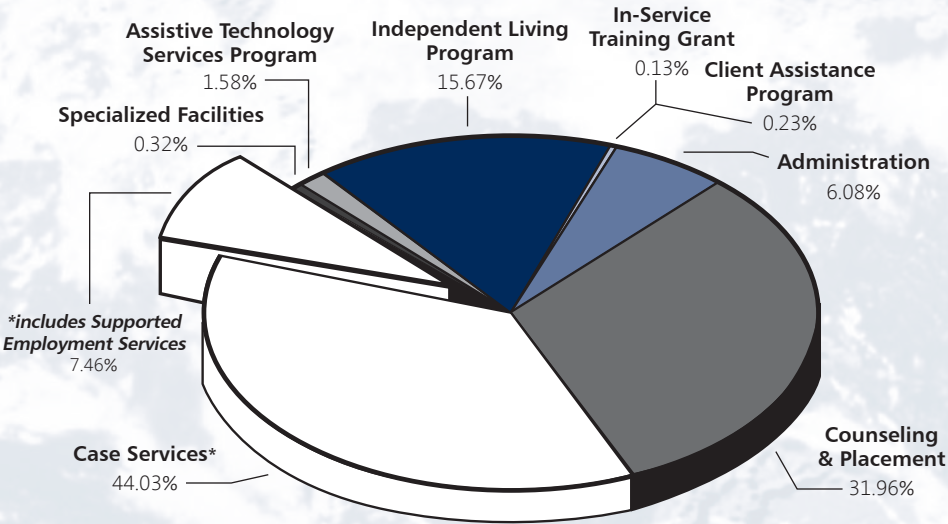
Earnings for Consumers with Successful Employment Outcomes			
Average Earnings	Weekly Earnings	Monthly Earnings	Annual Earnings
At Case Opening	\$45.76	\$198.30	\$2,379.58
At Case Closure	\$273.84	\$1,186.64	\$14,239.50
Average Increase	\$228.08	\$988.33	\$11,859.92
Total Increase	\$1,429.804	\$6,195,817.33	\$74,349,808

Consumers by Disability: Vocational Rehabilitation / Independent Living		
Primary Disability	VR Eligible Served	IL Eligible Served
Sensory/Communicative	2,508	324
Physical	16,130	5,718
Cognitive	16,721	0
Mental Illness	12,998	9
Other Mental Disabilities	6,185	4
Major Impairment not yet recorded	9	1
Total	49,528	6,056

Statewide Overview: Independent Living Rehabilitation Program	
Consumers Served in FFY 2009	6,056
Consumers still receiving services at the last day of the FFY	2,645
Independent Living Plans of Services Completed	2,189
Individuals Receiving Personal Assistance Services	364
Average per person cost for personal assistance services	\$11,652.88

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

FFY 2009 Program Expenditures



Administration \$8,485,984	Independent Living Program \$21,882,982
Case Services \$61,470,807	In-Service Training Grant \$181,669
Supported Employment Services \$10,412,879	Client Assistance Program \$314,697
Specialized Facilities \$450,784	Counseling & Placement \$44,627,868
Assisted Technology Program \$2,211,385	

VR “All-Stars”

In 2009, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services honored staff members in Washington and Wilmington with its eighth statewide “VR All-Star Awards.” The three were chosen from 11 recipients of VR’s regional “Superstar Awards.”

Employee volunteers manage the awards program in which agency staff nominate and vote on their co-workers.



Carl Thompson

- **Leadership** – Carl Thompson, a community rehabilitation specialist in the agency’s Wilmington office, was cited for outstanding achievement in leadership. The award praises Thompson for his “upbeat personality, strong work ethic ...willingness to do whatever it takes to get the job done” and his “deep understanding of community rehabilitation issues.”



Janet Loving

- **Customer Service** – Janet Loving, a business relations representative in the Washington office, was honored for her customer service. The award recognizes her “excellent planning and organizational skills (and) knack for tailoring her approach to developing jobs for her clients to best suit the needs of a particular, prospective employer.”



Sean Fitz-Simons

- **Creativity** – Sean Fitz-Simons, a rehabilitation engineer in the agency’s Wilmington office, was recognized for his creativity. The award honors Fitz-Simons for “his in-depth understanding of issues affecting his clients...his common-sense approach to problem-solving” and for “continuing to provide innovative leadership and creativity.”

Director Linda Harrington thanked the honorees and congratulated them “on achieving the greatest honor this agency bestows.... With this highest statewide recognition, you have been honored by your co-workers as ‘the best of the best.’”

Jeff Furst, president of the eastern N.C. chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, keynoted the December awards presentation, noting that the honorees reflected “commitment to excellence” in providing services to people with disabilities.

Health and Human Services Secretary Lanier Cansler also congratulated the recipients, noting that “the work of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services is an integral, important part of the department’s mission to serve the people of North Carolina, most especially those with disabilities. The contributions for which you’ve been recognized are indispensable in carrying out that work.”

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Linda Harrington, Director

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